

# Suriname

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## Freedom of the Press

The government generally respects freedom of expression and the press, as guaranteed under Article 19 of the country's constitution. However, Suriname has some of the most severe criminal defamation laws in the Caribbean, with prison sentences of up to seven years for "public expression of enmity, hatred, or contempt" toward the government, and up to five years' imprisonment for insulting the head of state. Unlike in previous years, there were cases brought against journalists in 2013. In September, former government minister Ramon Abrahams sued Jaap Hoogendam, publisher of the monthly magazine *Parbode*, over a report about the minister's allegedly corrupt practices. Abrahams sought over \$300,000 in damages. Suriname continues to lack freedom of information legislation.

In 2010, former dictator Dési Bouterse returned to the presidency after winning a democratic election, despite being on trial since 2007 for the 1982 murders of 15 political opponents, including five journalists. A 2012 amendment to the Amnesty Law then granted Bouterse and the 24 other suspects in the murders immunity from prosecution. The judge at Bouterse's trial adjourned the proceeding until a constitutional court, provided for by Suriname's constitution but not yet established, could determine whether the law could be applied to defendants whose trials had already begun. In August 2013, a draft law concerning the establishment of such a court was submitted for debate in the parliament, but as of year's end, the court had not yet been created. Such circumstances make any conviction unlikely and contribute to a climate of impunity for crimes committed against journalists and the media.

There are compelling indications that self-censorship significantly hampers freedom of expression in the Surinamese media. Little investigative journalism takes place due to pressure and intimidation from government officials, who often refuse to give information to journalists affiliated with opposition papers and instead limit their media contacts to state television. According to the Association of Surinamese Journalists (SVJ), communication between the government and the independent media in general has been poor, and the government has occasionally restricted the work of journalists by denying them access to press conferences and other official events. Coverage of certain issues, such as drug trafficking and the human rights abuses that took place under the Bouterse dictatorship in the 1980s, are also discouraged.

Despite these shortcomings, cases of physical harassment against journalists have been rare in recent years. Death threats and intimidation have occurred, but there were no reported incidents in 2013.

Suriname has a fairly diverse media sector, with numerous print publications. The two daily newspapers, *De Ware Tijd* and *De West*, are both privately owned, publish in either Dutch or English, and maintain independent websites. There are about 30 radio stations, including government-owned Stichting Radio Omroep Suriname (SRS), as well as one private and two state-owned television stations. Many media outlets are affiliated with particular political parties, which sometimes exert influence over news coverage. Chinese investment has recently surged in Suriname, resulting in an upgrade of the state television network. The growing Chinese community has created two daily newspapers and a new television station that operates in Mandarin. The SVJ has reported that low salaries and poor training have hurt the profession, and in January 2013 it raised concerns about plagiarism in the industry. Government advertising is reportedly often allocated in a political manner.

There are two internet service providers, and approximately 37 percent of the population had access to the



internet in 2013. Access is readily available in urban areas but much more limited in interior sections of the country. While there are no official restrictions on the internet, journalists have complained of government monitoring of their e-mail and social-media accounts.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

28

### **Legal Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

8

### **Political Environment**

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

13

### **Economic Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

7